



## South Dakota Department of the Military South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs



This week marked yet another first for the South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs and members of the Veterans Service Organizations!

The Veterans Council sponsored the first-ever Veterans Legislative breakfast on Friday, January 31, at the Ramkota in Pierre.

This event afforded all of us the opportunity to update legislators on issues impacting South Dakota's veterans, as well as demonstrate that we are all working together to improve the lives of South Dakota's veterans. In addition to the update, legislators were encouraged to participate in a Q&A segment which allowed us the opportunity to brief them on changes that have been made, as well as new programs and projects that are on the radar.

Special thanks to all the legislators that took time out of their busy schedule to participate. Special thanks also to the Veterans Council for their sponsorship of this event and for participating in the legislative educational endeavors.



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Heroes Among Us—showcasing 125 South Dakota veterans.



## SD GUARD SOLDIERS MAKE HISTORY AS FIRST FEMALE ARTILLERY CREWMEMBERS

Two young women made South Dakota Army National Guard history by enlisting as the first females to serve as Multiple Launch Rocket System crewmembers in the state.

Pfc. Erika Cotton, 19, of Volga, recently graduated from 13M crewmember Advanced Individual Training at Fort Sill, Okla., and Pvt. Stephanie Kasten, 18, of Hazel, will be attending her advance training this summer. Both are members of Battery A, 1-147th Field Artillery Battalion in Aberdeen.

The Multiple Launch Rocket System, or MLRS, is a highly mobile, automatic system that fires surface-to-surface rockets and missiles from the M270 platform. From inside the cab, the crew of three can fire up to 12 MLRS rockets or two tactical missiles.

Cotton and Kasten's opportunity to serve as MLRS artillery crewmembers comes at a time of significant change in the U.S. military. In January 2013, former Defense Secretary Leon Panetta and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Gen. Martin Dempsey, announced the rescission of the 1994 Direct Ground Combat Definition and Assignment Rule, which restricted women from joining artillery, armor, infantry and other combat roles. The policy change now allows women to serve in every position within the SDNG.



"In the case of Pfc. Cotton and Pvt. Kasten, they have an opportunity to be part of the historical push to allow females to perform a job based on their abilities and not their gender," said S.D. Army Guard State Command Sgt. Maj. Susan Shoe, senior noncommissioned officer. "That is huge. The opportunity for these two female Soldiers to learn a job they want is the significant change that was needed for our military to continue to be successful in the 21st century."

As 13M crewmembers, Kasten and Cotton's job duties are to drive and maintain the self-propelled launch vehicles, reload ammunition and resupply vehicles, test and maintain the fire-control systems and mount radio sets and communication systems. A few months after Kasten's discussion with her recruiter, she called to inform her that women are now eligible to join the field artillery for the first time in the history of the SDNG; if she was still interested. Kasten signed up and became the first female to enlist in the SDNG as an MLRS crewmember.

From the time Kasten enlisted up until now, she has felt welcomed in the unit and is treated no differently despite being the first woman, said Kasten. Not long after Kasten joined, another young female chose to take the challenge and enlist. Cotton, a freshman studying Animal Science at South Dakota State University, knew she wanted to serve her country since attending her school's Veteran's Day program when she was 15.

Cotton recalls the moment her recruiter came to her family's house to talk about the different units and jobs available in the Guard. The thrill of having the opportunity to shoot rockets is what motivated Cotton to accept the challenges of joining a unit not accustomed to women. Cotton credits her can-do attitude and work ethic to growing up on her family's ranch near Volga.

"Throughout recorded history, women have been an integral part of the military, whether officially or unofficially," said Shoe. "The last decade of wars has proven that the operational definition of combat means engaging the enemy in many capacities and not necessarily on a proverbial 'front line.' Women should be given the opportunity to serve in a position they can excel at and shouldn't be categorized in any manner other than the bottom line, can you do the job or not? If you can, then go for it!"





## HEROES AMONG US

Richard Stearns was born and raised in Madison, South Dakota. Graduated from General Beadle High School and entered the US Army. He retired after serving 25 years of service. His overseas assignment took him to Korea, England, Alaska, Germany and two years in Vietnam.

Stearns retired in April of 1979 and returned to Madison, SD. He graduated from Dakota State University in 1984 and became a Veterans Service Officer for the South Dakota Division of Veterans Affairs and later as a National Service Officer for the Paralyzed Veterans of America.

He has served as commander of both the Madison VFW Post and the Madison American Legion Post. He has served as Commander of South Dakota State VFW District Two. Received the South Dakota National Guard Service Member and Family Support 2012 Extra Mile Award. He Received the Department of South Dakota VFW "Gus" Amundsen Post Service Officer of the Year Award 2005.

While serving as a PVA National Service Officer, he received the Outstanding Service Award in 1997 from the South Dakota Veterans Service Officers Association for many years of dedicated Service to South Dakota veterans and their dependents.

Stearns still serves as the Madison VFW Post Service Officer and a volunteer DAV van driver getting veterans to VA facilities for their appointments.

While employed with the South Dakota Department of Military and Veterans Affairs he was awarded the 1989 Governor's award for Employee Excellence in "Community Service".

Richard met and married his wife, Dorothy Hughes while he was stationed in Liverpool, England in 1960. They have three sons, Major Richard Stearns Jr. currently serves in Germany, Captain Carl Stearns currently serving in the South Dakota Army National Guard in Brookings, and Christopher Stearns lives in Madison.

Thank you Richard, for your service to this great country and to South Dakota's veterans!!!!!!



## HEROES AMONG US

Kenneth Stillson is a Marshall County native. He joined the U.S. Army in 1953 and served two years with the 68<sup>th</sup> Armored Field Artillery. After discharge, Kenny began a 35 year career with Cenex Corporation retiring as manager of the local Co-op in Britton. During that time Kenny was an active part of many co-operative boards and professional organizations.

Kenny was also very civic minded serving on the Britton City Council first and then serving eight years as Mayor of Britton.

Kenny is a 55 year member of American Legion Post 80 at Britton. He has held several offices and served as Marshall County Veterans Service Officer for three years after retiring from Cenex. Now, fully retired from the working world, Kenny is active in his church, as a member of the local veterans color guard, the local senior citizens club, food pantry, Marshall County Historical Society and other local groups and organizations.

Thank you Kenny, for your service to this great country and to South Dakota's veterans!!!!!!



## VETERANS COMMISSION

The South Dakota Veterans Commission met this week in Pierre. Unfortunately, due to travel conflicts the Commission was unable to take action on any of their action items. The Commission will hold a special conference call next week to discuss and take action on legislative issues.

Secretary Zimmerman provided the Commission with a detailed update on legislation, Operation RAV, construction of the new veterans home and the process being utilized for the selection of the new superintendent for the veterans home.

Governor Dugaard has appointed Lori Vosika as the newest member of the Commission. Lori replaces Gene Murphy who has served on the Commission since 1990.

Lori currently serves as the OEF/OIF program manager at the VA Black Hills Health Care System.

## SDDVA PARTICIPATES IN YELLOW RIBBON

SDDVA Staffers Kevin Bowen and Ryan Fowler participated in the Yellow Ribbon event held in Chamberlain last Saturday for the 235th MP Unit from Rapid City and Sioux Falls. Bowen and Fowler provided a presentation on benefits available, as well as manned a booth.

Also on hand to assist the veterans was Ron Falor, VSO for Aurora, Brule and Jerauld Counties.

Special welcome home was extended to Dan Kivi, CVSO for Pennington County.





## OPERATION RAV



SDDVA staff had extra expertise on hand this week to assist with manning the Operation RAV booth at the Capitol.

On hand were County Veterans Service Officers: Wendy Weakland (Fall River), Angella Sutton (Meade), Ken Lindblad (Beadle and Sanborn), Terry Cousins (Todd and Tripp), Ron Falor (Aurora, Brule and Jerauld), Roy Farabee (Charles Mix and Gregory), and Fred Kuil (Douglas).

Sunday night, SDDVA Secretary Zimmerman was interviewed on Inside Keloland. We hope to do a couple of more of these prior to the kick off of all the open houses. If you didn't get a chance to view Inside Keloland — here is the link —

<http://www.keloland.com/newsdetail.cfm/>

[inside-keloland-operation-rav-free-thinkers-sioux-falls-tomorrow/?id=159186](http://www.keloland.com/newsdetail.cfm/inside-keloland-operation-rav-free-thinkers-sioux-falls-tomorrow/?id=159186)



## SD NATIONAL GUARD CELEBRATES 152 YEARS OF SERVICE

The South Dakota National Guard marks 152 years of service to the state and nation as they celebrated the Jan. 27, 1862, birth date of the organization's formation. With a proud 152-year heritage of serving as the state's militia, the SDNG finds its origins dating back to 1862 as part of the Dakota Territory. Since that time, SDNG units have served in nearly every major war or conflict since the Civil War, as well as provided assistance to the state in times of domestic emergencies such as floods, fires, tornadoes and winter storms.



### *The Beginning —*

The journey of the Dakota militiaman begins during the Civil War with Companies A and B of the Dakota Cavalry. On March 2, 1861, President James Buchanan signed the act establishing the Dakota Territory. By that time, Vermillion, Bon Homme and Elk Point were growing communities. The territory tended to be people who were genuine settlers, mostly immigrants from Germany, Norway and Sweden.

Earlier in the 1850s, the U.S. Army had established garrisons at Fort Pierre and Fort Randall on the Missouri River. Their mission was to protect the 5,000 settlers from the threat of attacks.

However, when the Civil War started, the Army withdrew three companies from Fort Randall leaving it in an exposed position. This led to the Dec. 7, 1861, proclamation, by the Territorial Governor William Jayne, to raise two companies of volunteer militia.

Recruiting centers were then established in Yankton, Vermillion and Bon Homme. The citizens were very patriotic with a lot of local pride, and in just over one month enough men had enlisted to assemble the first company of citizen-Soldiers. On Jan. 27, 1862, Capt. Nelson Miner, company commander, formed the unit in Yankton, Company A, Dakota Cavalry. This was the first unit of the Dakota Territory Militia and the birth of the South Dakota National Guard.

### *The History —*

Since that historic date in 1862, the SDNG has since seen combat during the Spanish-American War, World War I and II, Operation Just Cause and Operation Desert Storm. The National Guard was also called up during the Mexican Border Conflict, Korean War, Berlin Crisis and peacekeeping missions in Bosnia and Kosovo.

Since the Sept. 11, 2001 attacks on the United States, each of South Dakota's 22 National Guard communities has experienced a unit mobilization in support of Operation Noble Eagle, Operation Enduring Freedom and Operations Iraqi Freedom and New Dawn. More than 7,200 Soldiers and Airmen have deployed in support of these operations and continue to deploy time and time again.

The National Guard is the only military component that holds a dual-mission consisting of both federal and state roles. The federal mission is to maintain trained and equipped units available for prompt mobilization for war or a national emergency. At the state level, the governor reserves the ability, under the Constitution, to call up members of the National Guard in times of domestic emergencies.

Throughout the years, natural disasters have called forth the Guard's spirit of teamwork and sacrifice to battle floods, fires, blizzards and tornado destruction. From the Rapid City Flood of 1972 to the 1998 Spencer Tornado to Hurricane Katrina and Rita in 2005, and most recently the 2011 Missouri River Flood, the SDNG has helped its fellow South Dakotans and Americans in times of need.



## SD NATIONAL GUARD CELEBRATES 152 YEARS OF SERVICE (CONTINUED)

### *Today —*

Today's SDNG remains strong with nearly 4,300 Soldiers and Airmen available to execute its dual-mission on the state and federal level. The Guard is now in 22 communities throughout South Dakota and is comprised of 42 separate Army Guard units and detachments and 17 Air Guard units. These units perform a variety of missions; everything from command and control, administration, engineering, field artillery, transportation, logistics, communications, maintenance, aviation, public affairs, military police, firefighting and medical.

The Guard is no longer a strategic reserve to the active component, but an operational force directly integrated into active-duty deployments and missions. The force structure of the SDNG is designed to meet the needs of the future force; giving the Guard an enhanced capability to respond in times of emergencies and natural disasters and to support Overseas Contingency Operations.

The SDNG had a significant impact on the state's economy with more than \$179.3 million dollars in expenditures and wages in 2013. The SDNG is also one of the largest employers in the state with more than 960 full-time employees, along with nearly 3,300 traditional Guard members who train on a part-time basis while pursuing a career or civilian education.

These full-time employees, along with state employees and civilian contractors, work to assist the traditional Guardsman by providing administrative, training and logistical support. This support collectively goes into helping units meet mobilization and readiness requirements.

The South Dakota Army National Guard remains strong with more than 3,200 Soldiers available for state and federal missions. The nerve center for the SDARNG resides at the state headquarters at Camp Rapid in Rapid City; an 84-acre training site first developed in 1924.

The South Dakota Air National Guard is located on the southeast corner of Joe Foss Field in Sioux Falls and was federally recognized in 1946. It has more than 1,000 Airmen assigned to its headquarters and the 114th Fighter Wing. The mission of the SDANG is to provide combat capability to the war fight, security for the homeland and to provide combat-ready units in three roles: federal, state and community.

The SDNG is divided into different task forces to provide assistance to our local communities throughout the state in the event of an emergency. Separated by geographical regions, units are assigned to each task force providing personnel and equipment for response to severe weather, fires, natural disasters, search-and-rescue operations, civil disturbances or homeland defense.

The proud heirs of the militia tradition can be found in the men and women of today's SDNG. They stand ready to leave the comforts of home and family to defend the nation's interests and bring peace and hope to people throughout the world.



## ZIMMERMAN ATTENDS AMERICAN LEGION CONFERENCE

SDDVA Secretary Zimmerman attended the American Legion Mid Winter Conference in Huron on Saturday and provided an update on the 2014 legislative session, Operation RAV and the state veterans home.

"Having this opportunity to have open dialogue with American Legion membership is so beneficial and allows us to keep the communication highway traveling in both directions," said Secretary Zimmerman.

Secretary Zimmerman welcomes the opportunity to attend and participate in the veterans service organizations meetings and conferences.

## ZIMMERMAN ATTENDS YST CODE TALKER RECOGNITION CEREMONY

SDDVA Secretary Zimmerman attended a recognition ceremony for the Ross family and the Yankton Sioux Tribe Wednesday at the Fort Randall Casino, bringing local recognition to the secretive members of the nation's war effort from the 20th Century.

The role of code talkers was largely a secret for more than 50 years after World War II and it's believed that many of those who served in the U.S. with their language took that secret to their grave. The code talkers were crucial to the war effort, starting with their use in 1918 as part of World War I. Code talkers were used in World War II, as well, but primarily in the Pacific theater.

The American Indians' language barrier was a safe way of communicating without the enemy being able to learn the code, primarily because the languages were difficult to learn and hard to track with different accents, allowing the Americans to pass messages quickly.

The Yankton Sioux Tribe was one of four tribes to have code talkers serve in both World War I and World War II. More than 30 tribes were honored in November at the U.S. Capitol in Washington D.C., recognizing tribes that had code talkers assisting in the war efforts of World War I and World War II. In that honoring ceremony, each tribe received a gold medal for their service and each known code talker or their family received a silver medal, each with a special design for the tribes honored. In the case of the Yankton Sioux, the U.S. Mint designed a medal that has two code talkers on one side and a bison skull painted in honor of Yankton Sioux veterans on the other side.

Yankton Sioux Tribe Chairman Robert Flying Hawk accepted the tribe's gold medal on behalf of its people during the ceremony, which included spiritual songs and prayers and a "wiping of the tears" ceremony, which was to allow veterans to put the bad memories of war past them through the help of the spirit. In November, the local commander of the American Legion post Basel Heth and Elmo Eddy, the 92-year-old veteran who is the last living tribe member to serve in World War II, accepted the medals on behalf of the Yankton Sioux.





# Upcoming Events

## 2014

Feb 2-4—VFW Legislative Conference—Post 2038—Pierre  
Feb. 6—American Legion Legislative Reception—Post 8—Pierre  
Feb. 9—Four Chaplains Service—United Methodist Church—Sturgis—1:30 pm (MST)  
Feb. 15—Veterans Benefits Fair—Washington Pavilion—Sioux Falls—1:00 pm  
Feb. 15—Valentines for Veterans Concert—Washington Pavilion—Sioux Falls—3:00 pm  
Feb 15-16- 152<sup>nd</sup> Reintegration 30 Day Yellow Ribbon Event—Sioux Falls  
Feb. 18-19—SDDVA New VSO Orientation—Sioux Falls  
Mar. 21—Veterans Legal Services Workshop—VA Sioux Falls—4th Floor—9:00 am  
Apr. 5-6—152nd Yellow Ribbon  
Apr. 7—BHNC Unaccompanied Veterans Memorial Service—BHNC—9:00 am  
May 2-4—DAV State Convention—Ramkota Hotel—Aberdeen  
Jun 5-8—VFW State Convention—Custer  
Jun. 19-22—American Legion State Convention—Ramkota Hotel—Pierre  
Jul. 7—BHNC Unaccompanied Veterans Memorial Service—BHNC—9:00 am  
Aug. 6—DOL Veterans Job Fair—Augustana College Elmen Center—10:00 am—2:00 pm  
Aug. 25-29—NACVSO Training Ramkota Hotel—Pierre  
Oct. 6—BHNC Unaccompanied Veterans Memorial Service—BHNC—9:00 am

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